

# Lessons Learned: Multinational Division Central-South

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Strzelecki, Polish Army

**T**HE MISSION of the Polish Armed Forces in Iraq began in March 2003 with the first phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Poland deployed the special operations unit Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno Mobilnego [Polish Special Forces] to Iraq; the logistic support ship Okret Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Polish Republic Naval Ship] *Rear Admiral Xawery Czernicki* to the Persian Gulf; and a chemical decontamination platoon, on standby, to Jordan. Polish military assets used during the operation included 146 soldiers and 25 military vehicles, not an impressive contribution, but much appreciated because of the quality of the forces committed.

The Global War on Terrorism justified sending additional Polish troops to support the postwar coalition effort in Iraq. Poland, as “a lead nation,” decided to structure a multinational division with 24 contingents from 24 nations and conduct a stabilization mission, not an offensive one. In accordance with a memorandum of understanding signed by the Troops Contributing Nations, the Polish contingent—in fact, the entire Multinational Division (MND)—would operate under the authority of the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

The end state for Multinational Division Central-South (MND CS) was—

- For Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to take responsibility for regional control.
- For anti-Iraqi forces to be rendered incapable of operating effectively through the destruction of sanctuaries and the lessening of popular support.
- For local communities to predominantly accept and support the situation.
- For MND CS forces in local bases to help the

ISF and remain ready to support them with combat power when needed.<sup>2</sup>

On 9 June 2003, Poland sent the first group of soldiers to Iraq to help with the deployment of the main body of Polish and other nations’ troops. The Polish Military Contingent (PMC) (first rotation) deployed to Iraq with approximately 2,300 soldiers and took over an area of responsibility (AOR) in the Central-South sector. The AOR covered one-fourth of the country, where 3 to 5 million inhabitants (90 percent of whom are Shia) live. The AOR also contained the Muslim holy cities of Karbala and An-Najaf. The main task was to carry out a stabilization mission.

The PMC’s operational activities have been impressive. After the transfer of authority from U.S. forces on 3 September 2003, the MND CS has provided security and stabilization, created conditions for building new governmental structures, conducted thousands of patrols, set up approximately 15,000 permanent and movable checkpoints, organized thousands of convoys, trained over 20,000 new ISF officers, cleared mines and destroyed approximately 2 million pieces of munitions, and cleared thousands of square meters of roads.

With millions of U.S. dollars from the Commanders’ Emergency Response Funds available, the Polish Army could offer help to thousands of areawide projects, such as education, health services, and economic infrastructure improvement.<sup>3</sup> During the first and second PMC rotations, more than 1,490 projects costing more than \$55 million were completed. The third rotation began about 200 projects costing more than \$11.5 million. The projects included improvements in education, public safety, public health services, sewage and water systems, cultural heritage, transport,



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A Polish soldier operating with the Iraqi National Guard checks an AK-47 for booby traps, Hillah, Iraq, 23 August 2005.

electrification, agriculture, irrigation systems, municipal services, finance and economy, food production and distribution, and telecommunications. Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) activities and humanitarian assistance are ongoing and vital to the further improvement of Iraq. (See figure.)

### Current Status of Forces

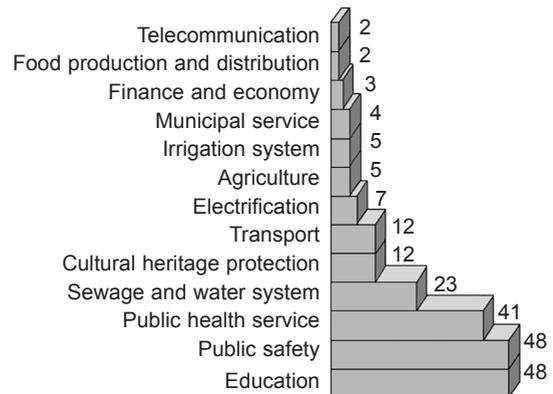
As of June 2005, about 1,600 Polish soldiers and 4,600 foreign troops from 15 nations were part of the Polish-led MND CS in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> The Division itself went through many organizational changes, including a change in the number of troops from contributing nations and changes in the AOR.

**Experience.** The experience the Polish soldiers gained; the skills they learned; the trust, confidence, and good opinion they generated among the allies were invaluable, and future Polish forces will be able to take the lessons learned to generate improvements and master the military arts. Over 16,000 soldiers have participated in operations abroad, 11,000 in Iraq alone. The soldiers' experience confirms the need for professional, light, deployable units and subunits ready to carry out a variety of missions.

**Language.** Because English was the language of command, Polish soldiers conducted daily routine talks, business, and so forth in English. Although soldiers' language skills were not perfect, they could understand the common language of command and perform their missions. Subordinate commands, such as the Spanish-led 3d Brigade Combat Team

(BCT), the Ukrainian-led 2d BCT, and the Polish BCT had no problems with internal communications because they were allowed to use their national languages.<sup>5</sup>

**Media.** The mission was complicated by the presence of Polish and visiting media representatives. The media had around-the-clock capabilities, satellite access, connectivity, global satellite phone systems, advanced technology, and live-capable devices, all of which were located on base in the AOR. The MND CS headquarters accredited 5 to 15 Polish journalists to cover all activities. Journalists from other countries temporarily accredited at the MND CS headquarters or visiting the base to report on a specific topic on short notice came from Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the



Number of projects completed during the Polish Army's first and second rotations.

United Kingdom, and the United States. Thirty Iraqi journalists as well as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabee stringers were also present.<sup>6</sup> Ground rules gave an equal chance to all media representatives to cover MND CS operations.

## The Future Focus

After 2005, when UN resolutions expire and a new Iraqi Parliament and Government assume power, reexamining the mission will be vital to meeting Polish and alliance goals. Poland will consult the United States and countries that contributed forces for the Polish-led division, as well as the Iraqi Government, to determine the purpose and character of future Polish contributions. After the October 2005 elections in Poland, newly appointed Minister of Defense Radek Sikorski visited Iraq and took part in official talks with the Iraqi president and the minister of defense. They asked the Polish Government to maintain its forces in Iraq and change its mission from conducting training and stabilization to conducting advisory activities and training. A decision about the Polish force's strength and mission will not be made until the end of 2005.

The main problems with MND CS involved achieving a well-tailored force structure and personnel professionalism. Structuring the MND CS according to NATO standards is not enough. Personnel should also have support from higher headquarters, clear objectives, sufficient professional knowledge and experience, and efficient equipment to use.

Operational lessons learned suggest a need for improved human intelligence, better trained military police, more flexible logistics, advance development of CIMIC and psychological warfare units, and a greater

number of field hospitals, including a combat-stress clinic. (Iraq has proved the importance of having medical support and medical-evacuation assets.) Operating units should be light, armored, and deployable and there should be more professional subunits. Having modern communications systems and a night-vision capacity is key to operational success.

Although MND CS was not to conduct offensive operations, its troops took preemptive measures to maintain law and order in the AOR. Such actions included organizing ambushes; detaining suspected persons; searching homes, cars, and other properties; and conducting a wide spectrum of night patrols, which sometimes resulted in engagements with the enemy.

Soldier preparedness, the will to fight, professionalism, and combat skills were important, but participating in such exchanges was a traumatic experience for some soldiers and caused temporary mental problems. Those not able to overcome the experience or who did not improve with medical treatment in the AOR were sent home for further treatment.

The force attempted to follow doctrinal procedures, but some procedures became irrelevant and did not apply in an environment of such dynamic change. In a multinational organization like MND CS, setting standing operating procedures is impossible because of participating countries' conflicting national regulations. For example, some countries are NATO members, others are not; a few belong to the Partnership for Peace Program; others are not active in NATO or in the European Union; many have had little experience in UN missions. Therefore, the MND CS's success, measured in real operational achievements, is truly significant. **MR**

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## NOTES

1. UN Security Resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003 and the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding of Warsaw give the United States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland authority in Iraq.

2. See Multinational Division Central-South (MND CS) Public Information Office Website, on-line at <[www.piomndcs.mil.pl](http://www.piomndcs.mil.pl)>, accessed 27 October 2005.

3. More than \$120 million was spent on civil-military cooperation projects.

4. MND CS included troops from Armenia, Bulgaria, Denmark, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the United States.

5. In May 2004, the Spanish Government withdrew the 3d BCT (approximately 1,600 soldiers). Soon after, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua followed.

6. Unfortunately, the media often did not report the truth, as when on 4 February 2004, the force captured one of Al-Sadr's supporters. News programs reported that Al-Sadr's lieutenant was killed followed by a report that coalition troops in Karbala had been defeated. See also Alistair Lyon, "Fierce Fighting Spreads Through Iraq," in *Intercrossors for America*, 8 April 2004, on-line at <[www.ifapray.org/NFOW/NFOW2004/Jan%20-%20June%202004/Fierce%20Fighting%20Spreads%20Throug%20Iraq%20-%20April%207,%202004.html](http://www.ifapray.org/NFOW/NFOW2004/Jan%20-%20June%202004/Fierce%20Fighting%20Spreads%20Throug%20Iraq%20-%20April%207,%202004.html)>, accessed 27 October 2005.

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*Lieutenant Colonel Robert Strzelecki, Polish Army, is a senior expert for military cooperation at the Analysis Branch of the Command, Control, and Communications Directorate. He received a B.A. from the Stefan Czarnicki Armor Officers Military College, an M.A. from the Adam Mickiewicz University of Pozhan, and is a graduate of the Canadian Forces Language School, the Canadian Forces School of Management, and the George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. In 2004, he joined Operation Iraqi Freedom as Chief of the Public Information Office and Spokesperson for the Commanding General, Multinational Division Central-South.*